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Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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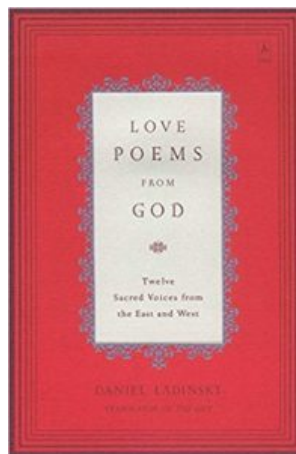


“Love Poems from God”

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on DECEMBER 17, 2018

A good friend recently gave me the book *Love Poems from God* by the translator Daniel Ladinsky. I really, really love it! I think the poems in the book are fitting for this time of the year as we celebrate God’s love for us in the person of Jesus. So consider this reflection as my early Christmas gift to all of you!

Love Poems from God is a collection of poems by twelve “timeless spiritual writers” from both the East and the West. They include Christian writers such as St. Catherine of Siena, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross as well as writers of other faith traditions such as Hafiz (a Sufi poet), Rumi (a Persian poet), Mira (an Indian poet) and Kabir (who blends the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian traditions.)



Ladinsky believes that certain mystics and saints from a wide range of religious traditions are “poetic conduits of the divine.” He chose the twelve writers in this volume of 300 poems because “they help us to know our own sacredness” and they all possess “the skill in awakening us to the wonder—and thus gratitude—of the common.” Let me share a few excerpts from this book that I found so nourishing.

We’ll begin with the poem “What Is Grace?” by St. John of the Cross.

“What is grace?” I asked God.

And He said, “All that happens.”

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
poet, farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I’ll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality— the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we’re all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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Then He added, when I looked perplexed,

“Could not lovers say that every moment in their lover’s arms was grace?

Existence is my arms...”

* * * * *

Hafiz, a 14th Century Persian poet, is still not that well-known in the West. But some poets such as Emerson and Goethe loved him. Goethe even wrote that “Hafiz has no peer.” Here is an excerpt from a poem by Hafiz entitled “Each Soul Completes Me.”

My

Beloved said,

“My name is not complete without yours....

I am made whole by your life. Each soul,

each soul

completes me.”

* * * * *

Living in the 16th Century, St. Teresa of Avila is “the most influential female saint in the West.” She bemoaned the gloom that sometimes pervades the Christian religion. In one poem she says she heard God say to her, “Enjoy me.” Those two words changed her life forever. Here is another poem of hers entitled “Not yet Ticked!”

How did those priests ever get so serious

and preach all that

gloom?

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I don't think God tickled them yet.

Beloved–Hurry.

* * * * *

Here's a fun poem (with a rather serious message) by Tukaram, an Indian poet of the 17th Century. To me, it speaks of respect for others—and the impact such respect can have on another. It's called, "First He Looked Confused."

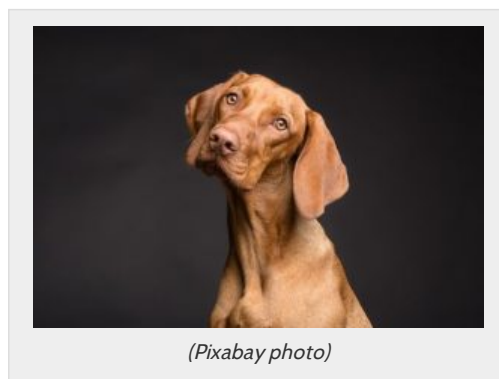
I could not lie anymore, so I started to call my dog "God."

First he looked confused,

then he started smiling, then he even

danced.

I kept at it: now he doesn't even bite.



I'm wondering

if this might work

on people.

* * * * *

This next poem is about St. Francis of Assisi's conversation with a squirrel concerning the Sacraments. It's called "The Sacraments."

One day St. Francis was speaking to his friend, a squirrel, about the Sacraments.

The squirrel "got so excited

that he ran into a hollow of his tree and came

back holding some acorns, an owl feather,

and a ribbon he had found!"

St Francis "just smiled and said, 'Yes, dear,

you understand:

everything imparts His grace.'"

* * * *



(Photo by pixabay)

When we think of St. Thomas Aquinas, we think of the many tomes of theology he wrote. But this little poem reveals another side of this great theologian. It's called "His Choir."

Sing, my tongue: sing my hand:

Sing, my feet, my knee,

my loins, my

whole body.

Indeed I am His

choir.

* * * * *

We will conclude with part of a poem by the great 14th Century Dominican saint, Catherine of Siena. It's entitled "Smells of Good Food." Catherine begins by describing how, as a little girl, she would wait eagerly for her father to come home from work. When he appears, she says:

I saw him coming.

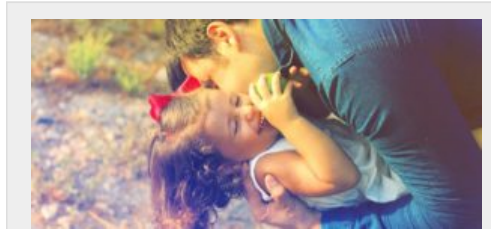
we ran into each other's arms

and he lifted me

as he so often had—

twirled me through the air

his hands beneath my arms.



(Pexels photo: Edward Cisneros)

This is what the Truth does:

lifts and lets us

fly.

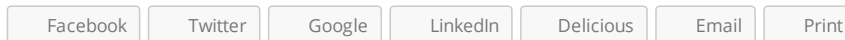
Did any of these poems stand out for you? Or any lines or phrases? Why?

Last week's song was about St. Joseph. Today's song focuses on Mary. It is entitled "Mary, Did You Know?" and is sung by Clay Aiken.



As usual, I encourage you to respond below to this reflection and/or song. I love hearing from you—and so do the readers of this blog!

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Roseann December 17, 2018 at 5:28 am



“Mary did you know”...one of my all time favorite songs; always get chills while listening to it.

This is what the Truth does: lifts us and let's us fly.
Like the feeling after going to confession.

REPLY

Joanne December 17, 2018 at 6:58 am



Beautiful song and message. Always look forward to receiving you email on Monday mornings.

REPLY

John Hopkins December 17, 2018 at 7:14 am



“What is grace?” I asked God.
And He said, “All that happens.”

How good is that!”

The Tukaram poems seem modern, doesn't it?

Thank you, Melannie.

REPLY

Rosanne December 17, 2018 at 7:27 am



“Not Yet Tickled” was a good reminder for me to lighten up. I tend to be more serious and focus on what I need to do. I pray God tickles me today and I can in turn brighten someone's day. Advent blessings to you and your ministry.

REPLY

Carol December 17, 2018 at 7:41 am



I am one of two in a performing duet AND one of a trio that also performs yesr round for shut-ins, the disenfranchised, the forgotten & lonely...this is one of our favorite songs of Christmas that proclaims a powerful message. Another, “MAN FROM GALILEE”...I encourage everyone to listen & reflect on that song as well.

The excerpts you posted & today's song serve to remind me of the variety of ways God has “gifted” his children to spread the “Word”. . I wish you & your followers a

blessed Christmas & a New Year filled with the strength & grace of the Holy Spirit to continue to fulfill each of our missions that God bestowed on each of us.

REPLY

Marie December 17, 2018 at 7:50 am



Thank you for the beautiful poetry. Your message is always uplifting. You are a gift to me!

REPLY

MARY December 17, 2018 at 8:05 am



I can't choose one that stands out because they all had something inspiring to say to me. I loved them all and what a variety of ways to see God.

I too loved the music and especially Clay's version which I had not heard before. Recently, when I hear this and I hear the words..."did you know that you kiss the face of God", I've come to the belief that we can ask that same question of every mother and father, for that matter.....we, who are made in God's image.....do we know we are kissing the face of God?

REPLY

Emilia December 17, 2018 at 8:08 am



This has been one of my favorite books for a number of years. I read a poem everyday as part of my morning prayer and have so many bookmarks of my favorite poems that the book has become quite bulky. You have mentioned several of my favorites, but I also love the poems about mirrors, music and dancing. Blessings as you continue enjoying Love Poems from God!

REPLY

Barbara December 17, 2018 at 8:48 am



Oh I love the tickled one. Our world needs much, much more tickling in this present day and time. And the dog being called God. I'm going to try it myself. And, of course, the song which I hadn't heard in years. I do love the songs and the

great part is they remain in your song brain for quite a while. Thank you for what you do to help us. It makes my week so much better.

REPLY

Kathy December 17, 2018 at 9:03 am



Each one of the poem excerpts were delightful and put me into a new way of thinking about God. Thank you for sharing. Always love your insights.

REPLY

Joanne Bennardo December 17, 2018 at 9:48 am



Dear Sister Melannie,

Thank you. This morning's entire blog is rich, but one particular poem caused me pause...one of God's coincidences. Let me explain.

St. Catherine of Siena is my mother's patron saint, and I have recently been asking her to intercede for my mother, who has been advised by her cardiologist to ready her final journey Home. My mother never knew her father, as he died a month before she was born. Now she questions, "Will my father know me?" This morning, Sister, you have given her an affirmative answer through St. Catherine's poem reflecting upon her own father. With a grateful heart, I will gladly read the poem to my mother.

Advent Blessings to you and your readers. Joanne

REPLY

Pete December 17, 2018 at 10:07 am



I first heard this song 20 years ago and have heard it sung by many different artists, and it STILL brings tears to my eyes!

REPLY

Jean December 17, 2018 at 10:56 am



Good Morning Sister Melannie,

Yes, Ticked!!! How meaningful is that!!

My favorite song, could listen it to it over and over again, which I do frequently.

Such a message and it does tickle my heart.
Thank you for another super start to the week.

REPLY

Cathy Magness December 17, 2018 at 10:59 am



Loved all of the poems you shared. In fact I'm going to order the book and reprint some of them in our weekly bulletin. (from your audio-visual assistant at Bergamo in Kettering OH!!) Blessings to you this Christmas Season Sister!

REPLY

Vicki December 17, 2018 at 11:09 am



This poetry is a great gift. Thank you.
Thank you for sharing.

REPLY

Sr. Sue December 17, 2018 at 11:29 am



Thank you for the reminder of the book Love Poems from God. I have the book but haven't looked at it for awhile. All the poems made me think of God's love of each of us but the one that struck me today was First He Looked Confused by Tukaram. Every time I pass someone on the streets, at the hospital and at a drop-in center for women I smile and greet the person. At first they are stunned like the dog when it was called God but then he was transformed. I hope my smile does the same to all the people I greet.

REPLY

carol December 17, 2018 at 11:41 am



Such treasures you have shared today.
Each poem spoke to me, and often
brought a big smile. Thanks S. Melannie.

REPLY

Cathy December 17, 2018 at 2:28 pm



I have enjoyed reading your column but am no longer receiving it because I have changed my email address. I'm so sad. Please add my new email to your list of subscribers. Thanks for your insights.

REPLY

Irene O'CONNOR December 17, 2018 at 3:55 pm



Dear Sister, We loved the poems you shared with us. You made our day more special! God bless you with a Merry Christmas!
Love,
Irene and the Sisters from 2nd floor front Solorium. XO

REPLY

Annie December 17, 2018 at 11:29 pm



That's one of my favorite books. The page edges are quite well-worn now. You mentioned several favorites, like the one about the squirrel. There is much wisdom in that book.

REPLY

Josita December 18, 2018 at 9:34 pm



Dear Melannie,
I was so happy to see that you have the book, too. It was given to me by one of my directees and I love the variety of beautiful, touching poems!
Pray with them often.
Advent joy and peace be yours.
Love, Josita

REPLY

Tom December 19, 2018 at 9:17 pm



When I was introduced to Thomas Aquinas by Msgr. Schumacher, I could never have imagined that he had "another side." I guess we should always be

attentive to that other side of the people in our lives and make sure we are not hiding ours from them.

REPLY

Jean Canatsey December 19, 2018 at 11:30 pm



I loved the poem about calling my dog "God". When I look into my dog's eyes, I see nothing but pure, undying love anddog spelled backward is God. I love your selection of "Mary Did You Know". It's one of my very favorite Christmas songs. Thank you, Sr. Melanie, for always getting my Mondays off to a good start!

REPLY

Linda May 1, 2019 at 11:36 am



Daniel Ladinsky is one of my best and oldest friends and I LOVE ALL OF HIS BOOKS OF POETRY. HE IS AN AMAZING WRITER. SOOO GLAD HIS WORK " LOVE POEMS FROM GOD " is so popular!!!! I have told him that is my favorite book but have read and enjoyed each book. And have seen future poems that he calls" mutant HAIKU " which will "ROCK "!!!! His poetry flows into him without stop from a very mystical place.....

REPLY

Linda Mccaskill May 1, 2019 at 11:47 am



Daniel Ladinsky is so great a poet that one realizes he has a portal to the universal and mystical realm!!!!!!

REPLY

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GOD'S GOODNESS AND PROVIDENT CARE.

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